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Designing a Musical Theatre Curriculum for the Modern University

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Masters of Fine
Arts in Theatre Pedagogy at Virginia Commonwealth University

by

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Abstract

DESIGNING A MUSICAL THEATRE CURRICULUM FOR THE MODERN UNIVERSITY

By Justin J. Amellio, M.F.A.

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts
at Virginia Commonwealth University

Virginia Commonwealth University, 2011

Major Director: Ms. Patti D'Beck, Assistant Professor of Theatre

The world around us has changed so much, socio-economically, that musical theatre departments around the country are facing budget shortfalls, staff attrition and even vertical cuts leading to full departmental closings. This paper attempts to divert these measures, as well as address the new role of student as consumer, by way of proposing a new musical theatre curricular model to satisfy the needs of both student and university alike. Topics such as fiscal responsibility in academe, departmental expectations, current employment statistics in the musical theatre field and current student learning outcomes are covered. The current student learning outcomes are then joined by two newly proposed outcomes and serve as a lens through which the curricular redesign is possible.

Introduction

In this paper I will attempt to update and refine the musical theatre curricular options currently available in many of today's leading theatre departments. This paper seeks to show the need for and the creation of a musical theatre curricular model that refines some of our previous thinking on the topic in the hopes of creating a leading-edge, well rounded theatrical professional capable of fluidity and sustained success in the field. There are no guarantees of attaining a life-long measure of career success in a field as subjective as ours. My aim with this discussion is to provide a curricular model in which our students stand a better chance of creating their own successes in the field for the times when luck may not be on their side.

In this attempt we will first take a look at the economic, social and cultural factors that have shifted the institutional ground beneath our feet and created a need for a curricular refinement of this nature. If the ground we are on is changing, we must know exactly how and what the new expectations for us are in this newly restrictive era. Through this, we can come up with strategies to keep up with our sister schools in business and science that have a much easier time of quantifying student and alumni success in the field. Secondly, we will study student learning outcomes and curricula from four programs in order to look for the essential parts needed to create a new offering in the musical theatre curricular cannon. Finally, I will introduce two new student-learning outcomes to the mix in order to shape our newly designed B.F.A. and B.A. musical theatre performance offerings.

My hope for this paper is that it will open up the possibility of refinement for programs currently considering curriculum redesign, the possibility of curricular adoption for those schools wondering whether a musical theatre performance B.A. or B.F.A is a right fit for their particular institution and a look into the institutional climates in which both of these choices would need to fit themselves.

Chapter 1

The Changing Face of the Modern University

In this chapter, we will first take a look at the state of the market place in which our academies exist and identify where the ground has shifted in ways that adversely affect our departments. This will make it possible to design a curriculum that will at once establish transparency in our actions and satisfy the ever-changing expectations of our administrations and students alike. To contextualize this paper, we must look at the state of the world in which we live and our universities operate.

The financial crisis of 2008 has shifted the ground beneath our feet and the aftershocks are headed toward the academy. Student-consumers and administrators now drive the university system. Interested only in quantifiable alumni success statistics and quick turnaround times on employment, fields that find it difficult to provide such evidence are having a tough time. Our field is one of them. In almost every other field a school can demonstrate that by a certain year in their training the student should be able to exhibit skills A-Z flawlessly. In musical theatre performance this is not possible. We teach the skills, but there are no guarantees each student will be at the exact same place in their learning at the exact same time. Competition in the professional field is also fiercer than ever. There are too many people vying for too few jobs. A career in musical theatre performance is difficult to come by.

We have to take all of this into account when designing our student learning experience. The question then is: how do we make our curricula as strong and competitive as we possibly

can? The answer lies in setting success-driven, quantifiable student learning outcomes that meet these demands. By the end of this chapter, the context will be clear and the need for change clearly illustrated.

As previously mentioned, the face of the modern university is much different than it used to be. Universities and colleges are now the market-driven catalogues out of which students pick and purchase access to their future profession. Higher education has changed from something one does to better oneself on a personal basis, to a recognizable commodity purchased by the consumer to maximize earning potential and provide a keen ROI (Return on Investment).

And now, thanks to the economic collapse of 2008 and subsequent financial fallout, the Return on Investment of an undergraduate education is nowhere near what it used to be. In a *Bloomberg Businessweek* article aptly titled: College: Big Investment, Paltry Return the old clichés of what a college degree is worth are put to the test:

If there's one truism that goes virtually unchallenged these days, it's that a college degree has great value [...]. Over the course of a working life, college graduates earn more than high school graduates [...] research estimates have pegged that figure at \$900,000, \$1.2 million, and \$1.6 million [...]. But new research suggests that the monetary value of a college degree may be vastly overblown. According to a study conducted by PayScale [...] the value of a college degree may be a lot closer to \$400,000 over 30 years and varies wildly from school to school [...]. In fact, there are only 17 schools in the study whose graduates can expect to recoup the cost of their education and out-earn a high school graduate. (Di Meglio 1)

This vast overestimation of the monetary worth of an undergraduate degree is one of the leading causes of the corporatization of the modern university. The now debunked financial myth of the worth of a college education is what lured the baby boomer generation to push an overwhelming amount of their children toward a college degree. This upped the worth of the undergraduate experience for a period just long enough for the myth to take root in our cultural lexicon. However, the saturation point has been hit and the net worth of an investment in an undergraduate degree has been declining so steadily that:

Richard Vedder, director of the Center for College Affordability and Productivity in Washington, D.C. notes that with the college-educated accounting for a larger percentage of Americans [than ever before], the bachelor's degree has been devalued and its Return on Investment (ROI) has taken a hit. [He warns us that] we have credential inflation in America. A College degree has become mundane and ordinary [...] We used to send kids to college to become lawyers and doctors. Now we send them to college to work at Walmart. (Di Meglio 2)

In light of these discoveries, the universities of which we are a part are under immense pressure to continuously prove themselves as worthy long-term investments with a high rate of return. In order to do this, our universities and colleges are restructuring themselves in the image of corporations and financially successful conglomerates. In the realm of this corporatized collegiate experience, a performing arts curriculum is in danger of no longer being an essential part of the School of the Arts. There is a newfound love of quantifiable data in the air, related to both student experience and fiscal responsibility alike. Departments found lacking in any way are subject to budgetary constraints, sanctions, even discontinuation.

The Center for College Affordability and Productivity's *25 Ways to Reduce the Cost of College* contends that since "a dynamic society needs change [...] major budget cuts arising from the 2008 financial crisis and subsequent recession offer institutions the opportunity to overcome otherwise intractable political opposition to eliminating unnecessary programs" (Marchand 1). They further support their point by saying that "not doing so is prohibitively costly to the rest of the institution" (Marchand 1).

Through studies like this, our universities' administrators are being told to take advantage of this politically and economically tumultuous time by utilizing this renewed call for fiscal responsibility to shut down departments perceived to be underperforming. Many of our higher-level administrators are being trained to stay on the lookout for "majors that once flourished [that] now have few students. Programs that were fashionable a generation ago [that] are now viewed as outmoded" are being closed in order to free up those precious financial resources "for new areas of academic inquiry based on technological advances, changing income and tastes, etc..." (Marchand 1).

Publications such as, *Cost Containment: A Survey of Current Practices at America's State Colleges and Universities*, are coming out with greater frequency. These studies, complete with cost-benefit analyses and strategies on how to successfully reduce the costs of offering higher education to our student-consumers, are geared toward our greater university administrators. Most of these studies involve empirical data collected from public colleges and universities. In the coming years we can expect to see the results of many like-minded studies in the private sector as well. The public institutions usually publish this type of data first as it is their duty to provide timely reports of fiscal responsibility efforts to their "shareholders" (i.e.: the public taxed heavily in order to fund these institutions). In this study,

the funding squeeze facing much of American public higher education is neither short-term, nor small. To the contrary, the gap between public needs to increase capacity in higher education and likely funding prospects to accomplish that is large and growing. Meeting the needs of the future will require new money, at a level that is not going to be forthcoming unless policy makers and the public are convinced that colleges and universities are good investments for public funding. (Containment 6)

On the other side of this call to arms is the fact that “realistically, even with growth in state resources, most of the funding needed to support future program innovation and change is going to come from reallocation of internal resources, not from new dollars from the state or tuition revenues” (Containment 6). To this end, “the large majority of institutions are willing to consider nearly all areas for possible cost containment opportunities” including “realiz[ing] enhanced cost management through judicious academic programming measures” (Containment 10-19).

Eight factors involving cuts to the academic programming sector of our departments are proposed in the *Cost Containment* study— by far the most of any method of containment described. I am raising these semi-incompatible forms of academic cost containment issues to show that we are capable of reasonably accommodating them via curricular refinement and redesign.

The survey demonstrated that areas associated with institutional academic programming have the potential to deliver cost savings. Between one-third and one-half of responding institutions have achieved cost savings in six of the eight

academic components surveyed related to academic programming, ranging from a review of course loads, course offerings and departmental mergers to program consolidation/discontinuation. Additionally, over one-half have achieved savings via the remaining two sources: utilization of contingent faculty and distance/online learning. Institutions should look to these areas for further potential cost savings while carefully considering the consequences so as not to degrade academic quality. (Containment 10)

The thought of losing our programs altogether, or just losing the bulk of our programs to contingent (adjunct) faculty has serious consequences on the future health of our field of study. In fact, the most called upon strategies for cost containment utilize resources that, as a theatre studies department, would seriously degrade the quality of the education we would be able to provide our students. The first strategy involving utilization of contingent faculty is currently being used by 56 percent of the institutions that responded to the study and is regarded as “one of the more controversial approaches to cost containment” due to the potential “compromising of academic quality” that comes with it (Containment 22).

I draw attention to this fact, not to knock the thousands of hard working adjunct faculty our departments both public and private thrive on in order to provide a varied and well-rounded educational experience for our students, but to point out the risks that come with overusing this strategy. When our departments utilize a large amount of contingent faculty the quality of education we are delivering to our students has almost no choice but to suffer - mostly because contingent faculty are just that: contingent. They are not eligible for tenure, have little to no job security in the position and are usually not utilized to their fullest potential. Furthermore, this overuse of adjunct faculty also causes us to deal with; breakdowns in departmental

communication, misunderstandings in the consistent delivery of the curricula we do have in place, massive job turnover and dissatisfaction at work that can lead to an overall lacking educational experience for instructor and student alike.

If we want stable, long-term educators that are aligned with our department's goals and student learning outcomes, then it is not enough to source them through contingent positions; we must find a way to keep them once they are within grasp. Conversely, in order to effectively use contingent faculty, our departments would do well to restrict their teaching load to introductory courses or courses in which their particular fields of experience are keenly useful to our inherent missions and student learning outcomes. This guarantees that we are correctly utilizing the contingent faculty we bring on as well as keeping an eye on our students' educational bottom line.

Yet another survey-prescribed way of dealing with responsible cost containment in the academic programming sector is the utilization of distance/online learning. "A slight majority of institutions (52 percent) utilize distance/online learning [...which] when used properly [...] can have positive effects on both financial and student learning outcomes" (Containment 22). Although it sounds promising in hitting both the learning outcomes and fiscal responsibility marks necessary to keeping our departments in the administration's good graces, distance learning is not usually a cost containment option reserved for theatre courses. The truth of the matter is the majority of what we teach is immediately and geographically relevant. Simply put; *where* our students learn is just as important as *what* they learn.

On the other hand, since the onus to show the administration that we are fiscally cognizant is up to the department, it is our duty to comb through our curricula and identify what courses could benefit from a distance learning approach. The first courses that come to mind as

potential candidates are: all levels of theatre and musical theatre history, literary/criticism courses, playwriting and dramatic literature to name a few. This switch would go a long way to showing our administration that we are willing to make changes in order to keep our legitimized places in their institutions.

The final, less threatening of the cost containment strategies outlined is increasing class size, as “four in ten (41 percent) institutions have increased class sizes to stretch instructional dollars further” (Containment 22). This is yet another form of containment that many of our departments are already dealing with. The ever-present space issue rampant on university and college campuses on a daily basis is not only stretching our dollars but our abilities to affectively teach our students as well.

With this in mind we must remember that it is our duty to try and keep up with the less physically demanding departments of academia (i.e.; the “butts in desks” stationary fields of study) while still maintaining the safety of our students and efficacy of our educational offerings. We are in a race for funding not just with the other art-centric departments, but with every other department on campus. Our theatre departments have to continue to prove that we can keep up while maintaining strict educational quality control despite the odds stacked against us.

If we can come together and figure out a way to publicly (preferably loudly – with fanfare) save our universities money, then we get a short-term reprieve. We could go on like this forever, saving a little and making a big noise about it. Yet, the single easiest way to prove to an administration that our department is worth keeping is to illustrate that the students we are graduating from our programs are successful, financially responsible members of the musical theatre profession.

We need to continue to find ways to show our administrations that our student-consumers have a chance at a higher Return on Investment (ROI) in our programs. Illustrating this does not mean that we will always be in our administration's good graces or that we will be guaranteed funding increases, but it may go a long way toward keeping our departmental doors open. Even though we are just at the beginning of this wave of wholesale program cuts, they have been going on for a few years and now is the best time to take proactive steps to ward off the fate some of our sister departments have already met.

To be sure, departmental closure is not yet the rule in the academy, but in the same *Cost Containment* study mentioned above it is said that,

at least one-third or more of surveyed institutions are using techniques such as discontinuing [...] programs with low enrollments, developing joint programs with other institutions, and putting forth other pragmatic efforts [in order to staunch the flow of financial lifeblood from their institutions. And] many institutions not currently using these techniques are analyzing them for possible future action. (Containment 22)

Keep in mind that this future is not far off; in fact the reality of program discontinuation is a very present problem for quite a few institutions.

These “vertical cuts, or strategic cuts, are targeted and seek to save money by eliminating entire programs” in order to “shift resources to areas where more beneficial use can be made of them” (Vedder 3). A very present-day case of this can be seen at Washington State University where:

In the early months of 2009, Washington State University found itself facing an astounding budget deficit of more than \$100 million after a 21 percent reduction in state appropriations. An approved 28 percent tuition increase and additional

\$16 million from one-time federal stimulus money brought the gap to \$54.2 million – or about 10 percent of the school’s entire budget. (Vedder 7)

In light of this spectacular financial shortfall, the decision was made that, along with three other departments,

The Department of Theater and Dance [would] also be phased out in 2011. The administration claimed that faculty in this department had little time for research and “lacked visibility and impact.” The university president also justified the cut because the school did not have the resources to bring the department to a level comparable to peer institutions. Essentially, in the case of this program, the university administration deemed that they valued the Department of Theater and Dance less than the resources that would be required to make it competitive and fit with institutional priorities. (Vedder 8)

While it certainly may not seem the best course of action “the current round of academic-program cuts in higher education is just the beginning [because] universities start eliminating academic departments when ‘there are no more notches in the belt to tighten’” says Peter D. Eckel, author of a 2003 book on the subject of funding cuts in higher education (Wilson 4). Washington State University is by no means the only program cut due to massive funding shortfalls. In fact “public colleges and universities across the country are under the gun as state budgets face huge shortfalls” (Adler 1).

One such institution is “the State University of New York [which] has had to cut \$640 million from its budget [causing] the president of its Albany campus [to] recently announce the suspension of five humanities programs” including theatre studies from its offerings (Adler 1).

Similar cuts are underway at “Louisiana State University [which is] grappling with severe cutbacks” and about to be witnessed in Missouri where “the governor [...] has told the state universities to cut under-enrolled majors” as well (Adler 3). Scarier still, “the reason these cuts in the humanities at SUNY” and other institutions “have garnered so much attention is because of fear that these disciplines are less career-oriented than business and technology [and therefore] less valued in a world dominated by the bottom line” (Adler 3). Truer words have not been spoken. If it is all about the bottom line, as research has confirmed, then what is an administration to do when those departments under their charge are unable to provide quantifiable evidence of their worth to the institution as a whole?

In the previous pages, many sound, short-term solutions for demonstrating fiscal responsibility to our higher-ups have been outlined. Yet, they are all stopgaps to help ward off a possibly inevitable future of tighter budgetary restraints and closer administrative oversight. The only truly effective way to keep our doors open and to prove that we are essential to the universities we serve is to prove it with our curricular goals and design. This starts with identifying the student learning outcomes we have in place that are working for us by way of eventual alumni success in the field. In other words, strengthening our bottom line through strengthening the educational experiences we give our students. In this vein, let us use the next few pages to look at some of the most common musical theatre performance student learning outcomes currently in existence.

Chapter 2

The Current Student Learning Outcomes

Based on the above context it seems as if our “theatre programs have little disciplinary and institutional power as departments are dropped from the university curricula, and those that remain struggle with diminishing funds, smaller student enrollments, dwindling audiences, and proliferating power struggles among demoralized faculty” (Berkeley, “Mall” 22). Why then propose curricular redesign when we may not even have a department in which to exercise these changes if times keep going the way they are? Simply put, the very “rescue of theatre studies from its state of decline depends on the willingness of scholars to understand the deep underlying criteria for defining the undergraduate curriculum and then to actively connect theatre studies to this process” (Berkeley, “Mall” 23). In successfully accomplishing this, the theatre departments in which our hypothetical musical theatre programs live will take a bold step toward demonstrating why we still belong in the universities we so loyally serve.

This is not to say that all of the existing musical theatre performance programs in the country are in danger of being cut from their institutions. It is intended to draw our collective attentions to the fact that “safe” is a word quickly vanishing from the university lexicon. The challenge ahead of us “is to construct curricular theories and practices for theatre studies that are directly relevant to the students of the time in ways that actively contribute” to their eventual success in the field (Berkeley, “Mall” 25).

The key to accomplishing this is starting with success-centered student learning outcomes. What do we want our students to leave our departments knowing for sure? What skills are relevant to the profession? What skills do we know they cannot hope to start a career without? We have to know the answers to these questions and so many more in order to identify our expected student learning outcomes, as:

Curricula that are not focused by clear statements of intended outcomes and that permit naïve students broad choices among courses can result in markedly different outcomes from those originally imagined; by graduation most students have come to understand that their degrees have more to do with successful accumulation of credits than with the purposeful pursuit of knowledge. (Diamond 2)

This sort of ad-hoc approach to learning is rampant throughout the university setting. In many ways, after years of applying curricular Band-Aids and stopgaps to academic course offerings many programs of study more closely resemble patchwork quilts than the cogent programs of study they are meant to be. This is a problem endemic to the wider academic setting, not just theatre departments. In fact,

We have reached a point at which we are more confident about the length of a college education than its content and purpose. Indeed, the major in most colleges is little more than a gathering of courses taken in one department, lacking structure and depth, as is often the case in the humanities and social sciences, or emphasizing content to the neglect of the essential style of inquiry on which the content is based. (Diamond 3)

Musical theatre performance is a hybrid presenting both of these unique problems. At times many of our programs focus on skills acquisition to the detriment of solidly grounding our students in the socio-historical context out of which our art form sprang. The opposite is true as well. In fact, according to Francis Hodge, one of educational theatre's founding fathers:

One of the principle reasons why the educational theatre has not yet realized its potential contribution is that many of those who now teach [...] design curriculum so inadequate and so superficial that students find it impossible to acquire a comprehensive knowledge of the art and craft of theatre. (Hodge 114)

While I do not agree with the harshness of Hodge's tone, I do think that the curricula we offer our students needs to be constantly assessed by way of constantly assessing both the students and the marketplace we are seeking to serve. This assessment starts with identifying the socio-economic expectations of the marketplace (previously mentioned in Chapter One) and then looking at some of the prominent student learning outcomes that currently exist in programs today. This will help to solidly ground us in what is, and lead us on a discovery of what we can do better in light of current circumstances. This will hopefully further disprove Hodge's theory as well.

To start, I find it necessary to mention how difficult it has been to locate clearly stated student learning outcomes for many of the programs that currently exist. In fact, some of the outcomes that follow were forcefully extrapolated from narratives that actually say very little about what the programs do for the students who enroll. It is almost always possible to find the what: by this I mean the list of courses available to the student (see Appendices A-D for a few examples). Yet, it is virtually impossible to find a list of expectations and assessment practices

that would give a student a frame through which to view their educational experiences. As you will see, when they are published, there is also no exact format of which these student-learning outcomes consist.

In an effort to help frame the reading of the next few pages, I think it necessary to outline the three most common student-learning outcomes found through this study. These outcomes exist, whether mentioned explicitly or not, in some form in each of the curricula included in the appendices as well as in many of those programs not included.

The Three Most Common Musical Theatre Performance B.F.A./B.A. Student Learning Outcomes:

- 1) Student will gain professional-level proficiency in skills pertinent to a career in the musical theatre profession. These include skills in; dance technique, vocal technique, acting technique, and writing and critical analysis.
- 2) Student will gain well-rounded and in-depth exposure to the past, present and proposed future of the musical theatre and theatre genres via close historical and literary study.
- 3) Student will gain experience in areas related to theatrical performance and production through practical application.

When attempting to create this aggregate cross section of the most important student learning outcomes it seemed prudent to look at as many programs as possible. Two of which “belong to the Cincinnati Conservatory of Music and to the Boston Conservatory of Music. Each year, these schools’ industry showcases attract almost every agent and casting director in

New York City” (Callan 1). Yet, when pouring through their websites neither of these schools publish their student learning outcomes. From looking at their course offerings and suggested yearly schedules, it is possible to infer some information about their guiding principles, but this is not the same as clearly stating their curricular intentions. What Boston Conservatory does say is that “the professional actor needs to be multi-talented with keen interpretive skills and strong musical and dance abilities” (Shane 1). This is very true, but it only speaks to one important, but certainly not singular student-learning outcome involving skills acquisition.

The same goes for Cincinnati Conservatory of Music, which goes a step further in stating that:

It is difficult to predict coming trends in musical theatre or to delineate the skills needed by the successful performers of the future. Broadway shows of the past decade have utilized a startling diversity of talents. *Contact*, *The Phantom of the Opera*, *Starlight Express*, *City of Angels* and *Pacific Overtures* have demanded of their casts powerful dance skills, operatic voices, prowess in roller-skating, jazz improvisation and a knowledge of the Kabuki stage, as well as the talent for capturing universal emotions in sound and movement. Today, a young performer wishing to pursue a career in musical theatre should be able to sing and dance and act with technical mastery and craft. And that is the minimum requirement! (http://ccm.uc.edu/theatre/musical_theatre/overview.html)

This is one of the most cogent definitions of the field I have ever seen. Musical theatre performance is unpredictable, and in order to stay on the leading edge of this virtually indefinable profession, we need to figure out a way to define it. By this I mean we need to clearly state what it is we want our students to get out of their time spent in our institutions, and

how we are going to provide that. And this definition has to go further than successful acquisition of skills. Of course, not many can argue with the track record of two of the most prolific producers of musical theatre talent in the country. My hope is that they have very clearly stated student learning outcomes, which they are using as guideposts for their stellar curricular offerings.

Although their outcomes may not be explicitly stated, the curricula offered by these two schools are formidable. They seem to consistently gauge the industry and make changes accordingly. This means, their student learning outcomes are more than likely, very well defined. I simply wish to know the criteria they are using to make these assessments and coordinated course offerings because their websites make it sound like successfully acquiring the prerequisite skills in voice, acting, and dance will make the student a successful musical theatre performer.

While this may be true in theory, it is not the whole story. Skills acquisition is a major part of what our programs should and do teach our students, but it is only part of the big picture. As the four curricula in the appendices will illustrate, each of our programs handles skills acquisition in many different and sometimes similar ways. Boston Conservatory breaks their skills courses down in the traditional ways: acting, singing and dancing, just like the rest of the schools. Yet, Boston Conservatory seems to have the most thorough understanding that acting is the backbone of musical theatre performance (and all performance if we are being particular). Nathan Stucky and Jessica Tomell-Presto in their essay entitled *Acting and Movement Training as a Pedagogy of the Body* say: “the way American institutions have chosen to train their actors have varied, but they almost always involve conceiving of the actor as an instrument (in body and voice) that can be adjusted, refined, improved, and tuned” (Stucky, Tomell-Presto 103).

This statement is proven many times over by comparing and contrasting the four curricula contained in appendices A-D. In choosing the curricula to include in the appendices, I tried to take a wide-angle snapshot of our field in order to illustrate how many different types of musical theatre performance curricula are out there. The B.F.A. and B.A. degrees look different at each institution in which they exist. The appendices illustrate that difference by including a conservatory program (Boston), a B.F.A. based in a liberal arts university (Ball State), a low-credit B.A. option (Cortland) and a higher-credit B.A. option (James Madison) to help give context to and show the flexibility of the proposed curricula that will follow.

In considering the aforementioned view on skills acquisition as it pertains to acting, Boston Conservatory takes the most thorough approach, as evidenced by the eight acting classes they require of their students throughout their entire four years of study (See Appendix A). These acting classes, in which voice, body, breath, impulse, characterization, etc... are all tackled are in addition to separate skills based courses in; Movement (required for two years over four courses); Voice and Speech (required for four years over eight courses); as well as the extra skills musical theatre calls for in singing voice and dance (by way of private lessons and ballet, tap, modern and jazz technique courses). The remaining three curricula seem to hold acting in a somewhat lesser place in the curricular structure. Each other school has chosen, in their own ways, to focus more on separate skills acquisition rather than skills acquisition plus consistent acting-based courses to help further elucidate the art of performance.

This most likely has much more to do with credit hour allotment given to each major and the fact that Boston Conservatory is a conservatory-based B.F.A. program in musical theatre. This setting allows the school to focus down on skills in a way that provides in-depth study and elucidation of topics covered. This sort of one-track focus is not quite possible for a B.F.A.

housed in a liberal arts university setting like Ball State University (see Appendix B) and the B.A. programs of James Madison University and SUNY College at Cortland (see Appendix D and C respectively) to accomplish. For example, one of the common denominators in the three remaining programs is that they each require only two acting courses as a part of their major. When looking at the rest of the courses offered it can be inferred that acting skills are also reinforced in the two studio courses (Studio 7 and 9) offered by Ball State University as well as the musical theatre performance courses offered by James Madison University and SUNY College at Cortland. This is neither a good nor a bad thing. Each program exists solely on its own merits and they are being compared and contrasted in order to give this discussion context. Yet, contextually, these differences do tell us that the implicit student learning outcomes of these three institutions rely most heavily on separate skills acquisition rather than synthesis courses to achieve their goals.

Moving onto the next most common student learning outcomes in our program of study we look to James Madison University's stated program objectives, which are as follows:

Program Objectives for the Musical Theatre Concentration

- 1) The student shall develop a thorough understanding of the unique and complex requirements of integrating music and theatre into a unified production.
- 2) The student shall develop expertise in specific performance techniques that are unique to musical theatre production to include: vocal skills, dance and choreographic skills, other specific skills appropriate to individual needs and abilities.

- 3) The student shall have a thorough knowledge of the allied music genre of opera, light opera, orchestra and choral performance, jazz and contemporary musical productions.
- 4) The student shall have a thorough knowledge of the history and literature of musical theatre, opera and other appropriate music areas.
- 5) The student shall participate regularly in musical theatre performances of various scales and styles. (JMU 1)

In objective number two, skills acquisition is very clearly stated as an important outcome. As evidenced in objective number four, we see the next student-learning outcome most of our programs have in common: “a thorough knowledge of the history and literature of musical theatre, opera, etc...” (JMU 1). This historic and literary grounding in the institution of musical theatre is imperative. In order to gain perspective on the scope of the profession in which our students are engaged, it is necessary to build into our curricula a thorough musical theatre history and literary component. All of the programs studied contain some form of this outcome as well.

For example, in SUNY College at Cortland much of this socio-historical basis in our field of study comes by way of unique courses and seminars in musical theatre history. In these courses the school utilizes a vast collection of almost every musical and operetta score ever recorded in order to give students a thorough grounding in both the musical/performance styles of the time, as well as the socio-historical context out which the works sprang. As an alumnus of this program I can say that this method of teaching gave me a context for, as well as an understanding of, just how different each period of musical theatre’s growth into an American made art form truly was. Utilizing score reports, song definitions and socio-historical context as

the backbone of the course design, students gain exposure to the entire cannon in “Musical Theatre and American Culture” (formerly known as Musical Theatre History I). In “Influences on the American Musical Theatre” and “Seminar in Musical Theatre” (see Appendix D), students gain in-depth exposure to two distinctly different periods in musical theatre history via similar means. “Intro to Drama,” a hybrid course offered cross-departmentally between Musical Theatre and English, brings the literary aspects of classic to contemporary theatre to light as well (Appendix C).

Moving along, the practical application of skills learned throughout the course of study via work in university or professional-based productions is the final outcome many schools have in common. “Stressing the role of lived experience in cognitive development,” both Ball State University and the State University of New York College at Cortland (found in Appendices B and D) require, on a credit-based basis, participation in university productions (Berkeley 19). The same can be said for Boston Conservatory of Music and James Madison University as well. This emphasis on practical experience is caused by “the present day trend toward professionalism” in our programs and is being addressed in many creative ways. Three of which follow: “(1) Many college amateur theatres are evolving toward professional status; (2) Some college theatre departments are adding guest stars to their ranks; (3) Some theatre departments are fostering the establishment of full-fledged professional companies” (Berkeley 17). This practical experience is germane to our student’s eventual livelihoods in the theatrical profession. Yet, in many ways at all of these institutions, the actual experience this practical work encapsulates is near impossible to quantify. This leaves our students with an uneven set of acquired skills and context. The next step is to figure out how to create a formal, standardized requirement surrounding our students’ experience with practical skills application.

These three common student-learning outcomes have served our programs very well over the past many years our field of study has existed in the university setting. Of course, as evidenced by James Madison University's program objectives, more can be added to this list, but the main three are found at virtually every institution offering an undergraduate musical theatre degree. Now that these three common outcomes have been established and discussed it is necessary to continue laying the groundwork for the proposed curricular redesign by way of adding two new student-learning outcomes to the mix.

Chapter 3

The Additional Two Student Learning Outcomes

The importance of starting curricular restructure from the foundation of solid student learning outcomes cannot be stressed enough. Yet, when considering the modern day context in which we live, it is essential to add two new and targeted student-learning outcomes to the mix in an effort to further frame the newly designed curricula that will follow. This addition speaks directly to the present day socio-economic standing issues many of our departments and most of our universities and colleges are grappling with (see chapter 1). These additions also ensure that our curricula are designed to “consider the future needs of society” and that we are “anticipat[ing] the skills that will be required [of our students] by the time today’s freshmen graduate and look for employment” (Diamond 35). Many times, curricular restructure is designed “to meet immediate needs without giving enough attention to [the] long-range requirements” of the field itself (Diamond 35). The two outcomes that follow will help us ensure this happens.

The two proposed student-learning outcomes are as follows:

Two proposed student-learning outcomes for Undergraduate Musical Theatre Programs:

- 1) Student will gain proficiency in at least one technical or administrative-related alternate career proficiency.
- 2) Student will gain abilities in creative entrepreneurship to help them start and sustain a performance or performance-related career.

Both of these outcomes have one thing in common: the need to broaden our departmental definitions of what success consists of in our art form. By officially adding these outcomes to our list and designing a curriculum with these in mind, as well as the previously mentioned three, we will go a long way toward addressing the need for higher student-centered success statistics from a curricular basis. This will, in turn, provide the much sought after alumni success statistics to our higher up administrators at the college and university levels. After much consideration and research concerning what is missing in our student learning outcomes, I have found that what we are currently offering is based on the skills needed to achieve success in our field, but leaves almost no option for the failure so many of our students will face. In the spirit of grounding this discussion in an agreed upon context, let us take a look at the state of the profession for which our programs are designed to prepare our students.

When considering the United States Labor Board statistical survey on our field (which also includes the fields of producing and directing), it is clear that the national outlook on our profession is bleak at best. The Labor Board states that, as of 2008, the national employment rate of actors, producers and directors was only 155, 100. To give this number context contrast it to the population of the United States, which currently hovers around 307,006,550 people. With this in mind, it is easy to see that employed theatre artists make up a startlingly low percentage of the working public. The hard part in analyzing this statistical data is the lack of evidentiary

support for the amount of people that attend a university, attain an undergraduate degree in musical theatre performance and do *not* make it (1).

Even though no data of this kind currently exists, it is safe to say that that the number of available jobs is far lower than the amount of hopefuls looking for a career. In fact, when looking at these statistics it is hard to figure out how our departments can ever compete in a field so overpopulated and underemployed. The Labor Board further describes our profession with the following:

Actors, Producers, and Directors

Significant Points

- Actors endure long periods of unemployment, intense competition for roles, and frequent rejections in auditions.
- Formal training through a university or acting conservatory is typical; however, many actors, producers, and directors find work on the basis of their experience and talent alone.
- Because earnings may be erratic, many actors, producers, and directors supplement their incomes by holding jobs in other fields. (U.S. Labor Board 1)

The National Labor Board is a formidable source of statistics and career-based knowledge and currently serves as our only federally sanctioned index of career outlooks and projections. They know that our graduates will “endure long periods of unemployment [and] frequent rejections” (1). Our departments understand this as well, which is why we try so hard to provide our

students with the skills necessary to become career-long musical theatre performers. Many times though, this just is not enough to ensure success in our field.

Actor's Equity Association, in their most recent employment survey conducted during the 2003-2004 season, backs this data up with the following:

- *Weekly Earnings:* [...] Each week an average of 5,673 actors were employed on an Equity contract. The median earning paid to all working actors this season was \$541 a week and performers worked a median of 11.99 weeks per year – that is, half worked fewer than 11.9 weeks and half worked more.
- *Annual Earnings:* [...] The majority of Equity actors (42%) earned between \$1-\$5,000 annually. The second largest percentage (approximately 30%) earned between \$5,000-\$15,000. Only 792 Equity actors earned over \$75,000 a year. (Shane 1)

Remember that, since statistics for Non-Equity performers is non-existent at this time, 792 people earning a living wage solely from performance related activities paints a distasteful picture of our field. To add to that, there is no way to tell what percentage of the 792 actors was actually employed in musicals. These statistics all but demand that our departments consider broadening their definition of what success in our field truly is. It is from this need that the following student learning outcomes spring.

New Student Learning Outcome 1: Student will gain proficiency in at least one technical or administrative-related alternate career proficiency.

Musical theatre, being as subjective a field as it is, leaves many of us without explanation of why student A makes it and students B-Z do not. In many ways, it is a statistical numbers game, but knowing that truth is half the battle. Simply put, I do not think that professors in the musical theatre profession will ever be able to truly “failure proof” their students in a field that depends so heavily on personal opinion. Yet, I think it is a worthy effort to build alternate definitions of and paths to successful theatrical careers into our students’ undergraduate experiences.

As with many departments in higher education, we are doing everything we can to design a curriculum that helps our students achieve success in the careers for which they are studying. Normally, the skills required to be successful in your field of study are easily quantifiable. Our sister schools in higher education (think: business and sciences especially), have a much easier job of providing success-centered statistics regarding their alumni. This is because the steps one must take in those fields are steady, easily identifiable and achievable by hitting the marks placed in front of one. For example, an undergraduate degree in nursing gives one almost immediate access to the profession of nursing itself. In order to attain an undergraduate degree in nursing one must only hit the marks, pass the test and apply for the plethora of jobs that already exist in the healthcare field. Illustrating this direct path to successful career placement to the administrative higher-ups is simple. You gain access into the profession by passing a test and

passing that test gives you a seal of approval the job market recognizes as the qualification needed to offer you employment.

The path for a musical theatre performer is not as clearly illustrated. At best, in light of the above statistics, attaining and sustaining a steady musical theatre performance career is difficult if not close to impossible. This is not to say a few wild success stories do not exist, but they are not the general rule. The harsh truth is that we are in a subjective, talent-based field. One must have a mastery of the skills needed in order to get in the room. And while teaching these skills does take place in our departments, as previously mentioned, no amount of skills acquisition alone can *guarantee* our students access to a full-fledged career.

While unemployment is a harsh reality of the musical theatre performance field, with a curricular tweak such as this new student learning outcome, performance is not the only career path we can be educating our students for during their time in our departments. Although we can certainly agree that musical theatre performance is the main thrust of our major of study, we can also use their time with us to prepare them for alternative careers in the field as well. For example, there are many positions involving access to the greater theatrical profession that require knowledge of performance to be effectively carried out, and at least allow our students to work in their field. These avenues can include, but are not limited to the arenas of: stage management, technical theatre, arts administration, teachers, directors, choreographers, agents, managers, producers and hundreds of other show-business related possibilities. All we have to do is formally build the opportunity of gaining some of this knowledge into our curricula.

This required alternative career preparation will not only give them a well-rounded approach to performance, but will most likely go a long way in keeping them active in the profession even when they may not be on stage. This sort of peripheral employment may go a

long way at curbing mid-career dropout and at the same time, keep the larger theatrical professions humming with eager and educated new administrators, stage managers, designers and the like. Letting our students know that “actors endure long periods of unemployment, intense competition for roles, and frequent rejection in auditions” is one thing, but preparing them to cope with these harsh truths in a way that gives them a modicum of control over their career path is another entirely (U.S. Labor Board 1). And, consequently, the very deficiency this particular student learning outcome is meant to address.

This alternate proficiency option is not meant to condense four years of intense study in say – light design – into a small number of courses. On the contrary, it is meant to provide more than a survey course, but less than a major concentration. It helps to think of it as a condensed minor in a certain set of theatre-specific skills. The four curricula previously discussed and housed in Appendices A-D all unofficially expose their students, in some way, to alternate career paths but not with a coherent set of courses. This outcome requires us to formalize these options for our students.

In each of our curricula lies the chance for an eager student to learn so many more things than the skills needed to make it on Broadway. This alternate proficiency is so very important, because for many of our students the opportunity of Broadway or comparable regional performance employment may never present itself. Statistically speaking, it is unsound to gear our students exclusively to that aim. Consequently, if our only departmental definition of success involves Broadway or Regional Theatre, then it becomes very difficult to prove to our administrative higher-ups that our departments had much more to do with the few successes we have had than luck itself. Therefore, building this alternate career preparation into our curricula

has the potential to illustrate a direct correlation between the skills studied within our departments and the eventual employment of our students.

New Student Learning Outcome 2: Student will gain abilities in creative entrepreneurship to help them start and sustain a performance or performance-related career.

This next proposed student-learning outcome succeeds the previous by way of offering our students business-based skills in creative entrepreneurship. Introducing, focusing on and reinforcing solid business acumen as it pertains to theatre artists is a must if we are to keep up with the socio-economic demands of the future. So much of being a success in this field is luck, but much of the rest of it relies on a keen business sense and the ability to recognize opportunities when they present themselves. This is not a capability many people are inherently possessed of, but it can be taught or at least fostered within the educational setting. Current “research [even] suggests [that] students with undergraduate entrepreneurship education are more successful entrepreneurs than those without” such skills (Bernstein, Carayannis 1).

To this end, in a field such as ours, where having the ability to capitalize on your inherent and learned talents may mean the difference between employment and unemployment; it makes sense to consider creating this separate learning outcome. After all, many of our current educators stress to their students the importance of recognizing opportunities and creating opportunities if none appear. Yet,

[while] research suggests high school students are interested in starting businesses [...] few students possess the knowledge to do so. Undergraduate

entrepreneurship education intends to address this gap by increasing students' understanding of entrepreneurship and their likelihood of success as entrepreneurs. (Bernstein, Carayannis 1)

To bring the importance of general entrepreneurship skills back into this paper's focus on the undergraduate musical theatre curriculum, Linda Essig, author of *Suffusing Entrepreneurship Education throughout the Theatre Curriculum*, recounts her struggling artist days as follows:

When I was a freelance designer without academic affiliation over two decades ago, my actor friends and I used to wait for the proverbial phone to ring while waiting tables or working temp jobs. In a good year, the phone might ring often enough. But times change and the climate for theatre artists changes as well.

There is more competition and fewer opportunities in traditional theatre forms in the major theatre cities [...] than there were then. (Essig 119)

Based on the above statistics of our field of study, Ms. Essig is spot on in her analysis of the industry. In fact, it seems as if each year more and more people flood the market as the market simultaneously shrinks. As previously mentioned, the outside forces (or hiring theatrical entities) may never turn their subjective gaze on many of our students. In building exposure to skills in creative entrepreneurship into our curricula we give our students the opportunity to see the potential mini-empires their talents might be if capitalized on in venture-based ways. And "there are basic skills of venture creation that can be taught across all disciplines. But to teach arts entrepreneurship to *artists* means to teach them to recognize or create an opportunity, manage and direct their careers, and launch their artistic enterprise" (Essig 119).

The trick to infusing our curricular offerings with this arts-centric business education is choosing the classes designed to introduce, focus on and reinforce these themes. Within the B.F.A. curriculum, with many more credit hours at our disposal, it is much easier to create specific creative entrepreneurship courses. In the B.A. curriculum however, the trick is to figure out where these themes can be worked into our existing course offerings by way of introducing and reinforcing the skills germane to our students through the courses that already exist. In both degree options, though, the preexisting courses dealing with audition preparation can be home to many of these skills with just a few tweaks.

Arguably, the most narrowly focused of our formal courses in arts entrepreneurship is Audition Techniques and Career Development. What distinguishes this course from a straightforward audition techniques class is that three of the five course objectives are to: 1) formulate a career objective plan; 2) establish contact with professional theatre and/or film companies; and 3) demonstrate the ability to write an arts grant application. These three objectives are clearly entrepreneurial, as they involve seeking, recognizing, and *creating* opportunity. (Essig 124)

With the course mentioned above, we see just a few of the potential business skills our students could learn through courses of this nature. The very act of affording our students the opportunity to submit a grant proposal or formally commit their career objectives to paper in a classroom environment is a step in the direction of putting some of the power for their eventual success back into their hands. Combine this particular student outcome in creating opportunities for yourself, with the knowledge of an alternate career path found in the previous outcome and you have the potential for an artistic tour de force in each of our students.

Like inventors in the engineering school, future theatre arts leaders can be educated about entrepreneurship within their theatre curriculum. Theatre artists, be they playwrights, designers, directors, or actors, develop creative products in the form of performances and plays, so they also can be taught – within their disciplines – to bring their creative products to their audiences, and be provided with opportunities to do so while students. (Essig 119)

In building a skill-set such as creative entrepreneurship into our course offerings and faculty lexicon we are essentially giving our students the necessary ability to bridge the gap between graduation and employment themselves. As a former musical theater performance major myself, I can tell you that if skills of this nature had been built into my undergraduate experience my conversation with money, career-related goals, self-created successes and much more would have been very different. Since we have established that our students will be entering a society with very little opportunity, a student-learning outcome such as this would go a long way toward focusing the trajectory of their careers. This will, much like the previous student-learning outcome, go a long way toward providing our departments with success-based alumni statistics to present to our administrations.

Chapter 4

The Proposed Curricula

As evidenced by the four curricula in the appendices, the musical theatre performance curriculum exists in many varied and valid forms. Separating these programs into the categories of B.A. and B.F.A. is no longer enough of a distinction. When combing through the curricula housed in the appendices it becomes clear that Boston Conservatory offers a B.F.A. program in a conservatory setting in which the liberal arts component is set up in such a way as to directly add to the student's arts-centric undergraduate major. Conversely, at Ball State University, we see a B.F.A. program existing outside of the conservatory model, housed within a liberal arts university. This connection to a greater liberal arts institution impacts the amount of credits Ball State's musical theatre major is able to offer its students by way of specific area study. This is due to the Ball State University overarching liberal arts intensive educational package. This package, much like that of a B.A. program, consists of a buffet of general education courses from which one could choose. This limits the amount of credits a Ball State University musical theatre major can take in his/her area of emphasis. Yet, even noting the differences in each curriculum, the choice for which degree type to pursue comes down to the kind of educational experience in which the student wants to partake.

In the proposed B.F.A. curriculum that follows I have chosen to take the five established student learning outcomes and create a curriculum that would be just as welcome in the conservatory model as it might be in the greater liberal arts institution as well. As evidenced by

the open-ended nature of the curriculum itself, this is just a guide based on the student learning outcomes I have discussed in this paper. A few select liberal arts courses have been included but are merely placeholders to show that the liberal arts component of these curricula can and should be left up to the institution housing the department. In an effort to further frame the following curricula, here is a complete list of the five newly established student-learning outcomes we have discussed throughout this paper:

The Five Student Learning Outcomes:

- 1) Student will gain professional-level proficiency in skills pertinent to a career in the musical theatre profession. These include skills in; dance technique, vocal technique, acting technique, and writing and critical analysis.
- 2) Student will gain well-rounded and in-depth exposure to the past, present and proposed future of the musical theatre and theatre genres via close historical and literary study.
- 3) Student will gain proficiency in at least one technical or administrative-related alternate career proficiency.
- 4) Student will gain abilities in creative entrepreneurship to help them start and sustain a performance or performance-related career.
- 5) Student will gain experience in areas related to theatrical performance and production through practical application.

To review, it is only through the consistent elucidation of these five student-learning outcomes that the following curriculum was created. Again, what follows is simply a roadmap.

Each institution choosing to adopt this curricular model should take the time to personalize it to their individual department and institutional needs. My hope is that this map will help departments more easily navigate the murky waters of curricular redesign.

Proposed B.F.A. Curriculum

Core Courses

A Life in the Theatre: An overview of Musical Theatre Performance and Performer in today's society.
(Orientation Seminar)

Acting Core (Required)

Acting 1 (3)
Acting 2 (3)
Acting 3 (3)

Period Movement for the actor (Covering various standard movement styles of the theatrical tradition: Fan/Renaissance/French Restoration, etc...) (3)

Basic Stage Combat 1 (3)

Dance Core (Required)

Ballet 1 (1)
Ballet 2 (1)
Ballet 3 (1)

Tap 1 (1)
Tap 2 (1)

Jazz 1 (1)
Jazz 2 (1)

Musical Theatre Dance 1 (Dance "in the styles of" three modern-day Choreographers) (1)
Musical Theatre Dance 2 (Dance "in the styles of" three modern-day Choreographers) (1)

History of Theatre Core (Required)

Theatre History 1 (Ancient to 1800) (3)
Theatre History 2 (1800 to contemporary) (3)

Musical Theatre History (3)

AND

Seminar in American Musical Theatre History (3)

OR

Performance Styles in American Musical Theatre History (Hybrid course of historical information as witnessed through the accepted performance styles of the day) (3)

OR

Musical Theatre History: a socio-cultural context for performance in American life. (3)

Technical Theatre Core (Required)

Technical Theatre 1 (survey course encompassing basics of technical theatre: shop safety, tool recognition, basics in construction [building a flat, constructing platforms, etc...]) Elements of costume design (course is team-taught by TD/Head Scenic designer and Costume Designer on faculty) (3)

Technical Theatre 2 (survey consisting of: intro to lighting/light designing, intro to scene/prop design and intro to sound design) (3)

Technical Theatre Seminars in:

Light Design (in-depth study in lighting design with practical application on departmental productions) (3)

OR

Costume/Makeup Design (in-depth study in Costume/Makeup design with practical application on departmental productions) (3)

OR

Set/props/projection Design (in-depth study in set/props/projection design with practical application on departmental productions) (3)

OR

Sound Design (in-depth study in Sound design with practical application on departmental productions) (3)

Voice/Musicianship for Musical Theatre Performer (Required)

Applied Voice studios (1 per semester all four years) private voice lessons in which beginner-advanced vocal technique is discussed and the workplace for the student's repertoire-building activities. (.5)

Musicianship 1 (basic study of musical makeup: time signatures, notes, etc...) Student can be exempted from this course providing proper documentation/skills assessment. (3)

Voice for the Actor (3)

Applied Piano (3)

Synthesis of Skills (Putting it Together) (Required)

The Business of Acting (3)

Audition Preparation (3)

Musical Theatre Performance 1 (3)

Musical Theatre Performance 2 (3)

Senior Recital/Thesis (capstone project)(3)

Portfolio Presentation

Exit Interview

Practical Experience:

Technical Theatre experience (if not available as stated above in technical theatre requirement then must be run-crew or serve in another technical way on at least 3 departmental productions) (.5)

If cast, must accept roles as given in any and all departmental productions unless sufficient evidence is cited for inability to participate. (.5)

All majors must audition for each and every departmental production for first two years in program. (0)

Theatre Electives (one sequence of the following is required):

(Following Electives make up three-four course sequences in one or more related Theatrical proficiencies we think will make the artist more marketable in today's ever-changing society). A student-developed elective program can be undertaken if designed by student with available courses and agreed upon by department.

Arts Administration Sequence:

Theatre Management (3)

Marketing for the Modern Theatre (3)

Development/Grant writing for the Modern Theatre (3)
Directing 1 (3)

Directing Sequence:

Directing 1 (3)
Directing 2 (3)
Seminar in Directing (3)
Stage Management 1 (3)

Choreography Sequence:

Choreography 1 (3)
Choreography 2 (3)
Seminar in Choreography (3)
Directing 1 (3)

Stage Management Sequence:

Stage Management 1 (3)
Stage Management 2 (3)
Directing 1 (3)
Extra Technical Specialization from Requirements list (3)

Stage Combat Sequence:

Intermediate Stage Combat (3)
Advanced Stage Combat (3)
Seminar in Stage Combat Certification through (DAI and/or SAFD) (6)

Modern Theatre Studies Sequence:

GLBTQ Theatre (3)
Asian Theatre (3)
Theatre of the African Continuum (3)
Behind the Iron Curtain: Theatre of the Eastern Bloc before and after the fall of Communism (3)

Other Electives:

Various Independent studies generated by student/faculty want/need... (3-9)
Special topic on the Director/Choreographer Hybrids in History (3)
Various Acting Electives (3)
Various Music Electives (3)

Various Dance Electives:

Modern (1)
Contemporary (1)
Hip Hop (1)
Other special sections as instructors allow (1)

College Sanctioned General Electives are required in:

English Composition (3)
Literature (3)
Art History (3)
Intro to College Seminar (1)
Cultural Studies (3)
Psychology (3)
Sociology (3)
Natural Science + Equivalent Lab (3)

Sample Musical Theatre B.F.A. Four-year program outline:

Freshman Year (Fall Semester)

Acting 1 (3)
Ballet 1 (1)
Applied Voice (.5)
Comp 101 (3) [or other if exempt] (GE)
College Intro 101 (1) (GE)
GE (3)
A Life in Musical Theatre: Intro to Program (1)
Basic Musicianship (or other Theatre elective if exempt) (3)
Theatre History 1 (3)
Production Participation (.5)
- 19 Credit Hours

Freshman Year (Spring Semester)

Acting 1 (3)
Ballet 1(1)
Jazz 1 (1)
Applied Voice (.5)
Voice for the Actor (3)
Comp 102 (3) (GE)
Technical Theatre 1 (3)
Theatre History 2 (3)
Production Participation (.5)
- 18 Credit Hours

Sophomore Year (Fall Semester)

Acting 2 (3)
Ballet 2 (1)
Tap 1 (1)
Applied Voice (.5)
Beginning Stage Combat (3)
Technical Theatre 2 (3)
GE (3)
Musical Theatre History 1 (3)
Production Participation (.5)
- 18 Credit Hours

Sophomore Year (Spring Semester)

Acting 2 (3)
Ballet 2 (1)
Jazz 2 or Tap 2 (1)
Applied Voice (.5)
Period Movement Styles for the Actor (3)
Special Topics in Tech. Theatre (3)
GE (3)
Musical Theatre History 2 (student's choice) (3)
Production participation (.5)
- 18 Credit Hours

Junior Year (Fall Semester)

Acting 3 (3)
Ballet 3 (1)
Tap 2 or Jazz 2 (whichever not taken previously) (1)
Musical Theatre Dance 1 (1)
Applied Voice (.5)
Theatre Elective (3)
GE (3)
Musical Theatre Performance 1 (1.5)
Acting as a Business (3)
Production Participation (.5)
- 17.5 Credit Hours

Junior Year (Spring Semester)

Acting 3 (3)
Ballet 3 (1)
Musical Theatre Dance 1 (1)
Dance Elective (1)
Applied Voice (.5)
Theatre Elective (3)
GE (3)
Audition Preparation (3)
Musical Theatre Performance 1 (1.5)
Production Participation (.5)
- 17.5 Credit hours

Senior Year (Fall Semester)

Acting-related elective OR Music-related elective (i.e.: Applied Piano) (3)
Musical Theatre Dance 2 (1)
Applied Voice (.5)
Musical Theatre Performance 2 (1.5)
Theatre Elective (3)
GE + Lab [possible] (3)
Production Participation (.5)
- 12.5 Credit Hours

Senior Year (Spring Semester)

2 Theatre Electives (6)
Musical Theatre Dance 2 (1)
Applied Voice (.5)
GE (3)
Musical Theatre Performance 2 (1.5)
Senior Recital Project (3)
OR
Senior Thesis Project (3)
Production Participation (.5)
- 15.5 Credit Hours

Total Credit Hours for B.F.A. degree: 136

As we have established earlier in the discussion, creating a B.A. curriculum that takes these five student-learning outcomes into account in their entirety is a difficult proposition. The limited amount of credit hours in which we have to accomplish the five established student learning outcomes significantly minimizes the amount of separate courses our departments can create in which to focus on just one thing at a time. It is in designing a B.A. curriculum that it becomes apparent just how important individual course design truly is. For it is within the units that make up our individual course structures that we will be able to most fully address each of the five student learning outcomes. For example, instead of having many separate courses designed to cultivate our students' creative entrepreneurship capabilities, we have to figure out ways to infuse these tenets across the limited amount of courses we are able to offer within the B.A. setting.

There is also an increased emphasis on “putting it all together” courses within the B.A. curriculum; again, for the same reasons of credit preservation mentioned above. For example, when looking at the B.A. versus the B.F.A., any loss of singular skills-acquisition courses (i.e.: jazz dance II), are addressed by the addition of synthesis courses like “Musical Theatre Dance.” This course will, in many ways, address the loss of the level two jazz dance course by working in jazz-based choreographic pieces pulling from that skill set. This combination of skills is seen in each area of emphasis mentioned below. What were separate courses in the B.F.A. show up here, as combined courses (i.e.: piano skills/theory, stage combat/movement, etc...). Simply put, the B.A. curriculum has to play like the “Phantom of the Opera Highlights Cast Recording;” containing all of the best parts of the B.F.A. courses, shrunk down in stature to fit many less credits.

For example, when examining the two B.A. programs contained in the appendices the credit hour allotment on which each institution (SUNY Cortland and James Madison University) has chosen to build their curricula vary from 35 credit hours to 63 credit hours of required courses. It is this writer's opinion that the more we can offer our B.A. students by way of individual credit-bearing courses, the better. The following curriculum is geared to that end by offering a total accumulation of between 60 and 63 credit hours of musical theatre based instruction to students. Also note, due to the varied makeup of liberal arts universities and colleges, there will be no sample four-year plan that follows this curricular option. This choice was made in order to leave the final makeup of the program up to each individual institution.

Proposed B.A. Curriculum

Core Courses

A Life in the Theatre: An overview of Musical Theatre Performance and Performer in today's society. (Orientation Seminar) (1)

Acting Core

Acting 1 (3)
Acting 2 (3)
Acting 3 (3)
Basic Stage Combat/Period Movement (3)

Dance Core

Ballet 1 (1)
Ballet 2 (1)

Tap 1 (1)
Tap 2 (1)

Jazz 1 (1)

Musical Theatre Dance 1 (1)
Musical Theatre Dance 2 (1)

History/Literature of Theatre

Theatre History (3)
Musical Theatre History (3)
Introduction to Drama (3)

Technical Theatre Core

Technical Theatre 1 (survey course encompassing basics of technical theatre; shop safety, tool recognition, basics in construction). Elements of costume design (course is team-taught by TD/Head Scenic/Costume Designer on faculty) (3)

Seminar in Technical Theatre (pick one of following: lights, sound, costume, set) (3)

Practical experience in technical theatre (1 credit over two .5 credit productions)

Voice/Musicianship for Musical Theatre performer

Applied Voice Studios (1 per semester – all four years) = (4 credits at .5 credit/semester)
Applied piano/musicianship (3) – combined course of basic piano skills for performer and light theory/musicianship.

Synthesis of Skills

The business of Performance (3) – combination of audition preparation and career preparation
Musical Theatre Performance 1 (2)
Musical Theatre Performance 2 (2)
Capstone Project (3)
Exit Interview/Portfolio Presentation

Practical Experience:

If cast, must accept roles as given in any and all departmental productions unless sufficient evidence is cited for inability to participate (.5)
All majors must audition for each departmental production for first two years of program (0)

Theatre Electives (one sequence of the following is required):

(Following Electives make up three-course sequences in one or more related Theatrical proficiencies). A student-developed elective program can be undertaken if designed by student with available courses and agreed upon by department.

Arts Administration Sequence:

Theatre Management/Marketing for the Modern Theatre (3)

Development/Grant writing for the Modern Theatre (3)

Directing 1 (3)

Directing Sequence:

Directing 1 (3)

Directing 2 (3)

Stage Management 1 (3)

Choreography Sequence:

Choreography 1 (3)

Choreography 2 (3)

Directing 1 (3)

Stage Management Sequence:

Stage Management 1 (3)

Stage Management 2 (3)

Directing 1 (3)

Stage Combat Sequence:

Intermediate Stage Combat (3)

Advanced Stage Combat (3)

Seminar in Stage Combat Certification through (DAI and/or SAFD) (3)

Modern Theatre/Diversity Studies Sequence:

Modern Drama (3)

Theatre of Diversity (3)

Seminar in Specific Section of Theatre Studies (chosen by student) (3)

60-63 credits in total – plus the liberal arts requirements of the individual university.

Conclusion

In closing, it is my supreme hope that this stab at curricular refinement is of help to future programs attempting to address the ever-changing needs of our society through their curricular offerings. Curriculum redesign is an arduous task. Yet, once we start from a place of what best serves our students' futures and design student-learning outcomes to that end, we will start to see an upswing in alumni career success. Of course, at this point, it is just a hunch on my part. Yet, all of the research points towards a need to address the mercurial natures of our profession and society through our curricular offerings. After all, "throughout its history, the American university has learned to accommodate divergent functions [...] that have been organized into curricula and legitimized on the basis of changing ideas about the uses of knowledge" in our society (Berkeley 8). As evidenced in this paper, the American university is in the middle of yet another change in response to our society. Student-consumers and parents alike are looking for quantifiable evidence that the return on their educational investments will be substantial. To that end, a curricular redesign that takes these realities into account will go a long way toward keeping our departments vital to the universities we serve.

Nothing will change the fact that no matter what we do there will always be a gap between the amount of students we graduate and the amount of students steadily earning their livings in this industry. All we can hope for as collective departments of musical theatre education is to contribute, in some small way, to the eventual minimizing of that gap. My hope is that this paper is one small step toward that goal.

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Appendix A

Boston Conservatory of Music – Bachelor of Fine Arts in Musical Theatre Performance

Total: 132 Credits

Musical Theatre, Music and Voice (38 credits)

Applied Voice Lessons (1 credit/semester)	8 credits (Year 1-4)
Ear Training 1 and 2	2 credits (Year 1)
Piano Class 1 and 2	2 credits (Year 1)
Sophomore Music Lab	2 credits (Year 2)
Junior Music Lab	2 credits (Year 3)
Musical Theatre 1 and 2 (Ensemble Singing)	4 credits (Year 1)
Musical Theatre 3 and 4 (Song Performance)	5 credits (Year 2)
Musical Theatre 5 and 6 (Scene Study)	5 credits (Year 3)
Musical Theatre 7 and 8 (Preparing for the Profession)	3 credits (Year 4)
Senior Showcase 1 and 2	3 credits (Year 4)

Acting, Movement, Voice and Speech (35 credits)

Acting 1-8 (one class/semester)	19 credits (Years 1-4)
Movement for the Actor	4 credits (Years 1-2)
Voice and Speech 1-8 (one class/semester)	12 credits (Years 1-4)

Dance (12 credits)

Modern Technique (3 hours/week, both semesters)	2 credits (Year 1)
Ballet Technique (3 hours/week)	4 credits (Years 1-3)
Jazz Technique (3 hours/week)	4 credits (Years 2-3)
Tap (1.5-2 hours/week)	2 credits (Years 1, 2, or 3)

Other Courses in Major (6 credits)

Stagecraft Practicum	1 credit (Year 1)
Directing 1 and 2	2 credits (Year 3)
Theatre Electives by permission (Chosen from among Directing, Acting, Dance, Musical Performance, and other areas)	3 credits (Year 4)

General Studies (41 credits)

Liberal Arts Core 1 and 2	6 credits (Year 1)
Introduction to Theatre	1 credit (Year 1)
History of Musical Theatre	1 credit (Year 1)
Liberal Arts Core 3 and 4	6 credits (Year 2)
Shakespeare	3 credits (Year 2)
Liberal Arts Core 5	3 credits (Year 3)
A Course in Science or Mathematics	3 credits (Year 2 or 3)
Theatre History 1 and 2	6 credits (Year 3)
Modern Drama 1 and 2	6 credits (Year 4)
Liberal Arts Electives	6 credits (Years 2, 3, or 4)

Appendix B

Ball State University – B.F.A. Musical Theatre Curriculum

Total: 85 credits (plus 39 credit University sanctioned core curriculum) = 124

Theatre Core Curriculum (32 Credit Hours)

Computers in Theatre and Dance	3 credits
Aesthetics of the Theatre	3 credits
Aesthetics of the Theatre	3 credits
Freshman/Senior Experience	0 credits
Design Awareness for Theatre and Dance	3 credits
Stagecraft	3 credits
Acting I	3 credits
Directing 1	3 credits
Theatre Practicum	2 credits
History of Theatre 1	3 credits
Modern Theatre	3 credits
Shakespeare	3 credits

Musical Theatre Option (53 Credit Hours)

Dance

Ballet 1	1 credit
Ballet 2	1 credit

Tap 1	1 credit
Jazz 1	1 credit
Jazz 2	2 credits
Tap 2	1 credit
Musical Theatre Dance	2 credits
Advanced Musical Theatre Dance	2 credits

Music

Basic Musicianship 1	2 credits
Basic Musicianship 2	2 credits
Sight Singing 1	1 credit
Sight Singing 2	1 credit
Music Theatre Ensemble	1 credit
Voice Lesson	1 credit
Voice Performance Lab	0 credit
Singing Actor 1	2 credits
Singing Actor 2	2 credits

Theatre

Principles of Stage Makeup	2 credits
Acting 2	3 credits
Advanced Topics in History	3 credits
Freshman Performance Lab	1 credit
Movement Studio 1	3 credits
Studio 7/Scene Study	

Character/Text Analysis	3 credits
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Studio 9/Stage Combat	3 credits
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Directed Electives

Immersion Experience	3-9 credits
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Show/Graduation	0-3 credits
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Appendix C

BA musical Theatre programs

State University of New York at Cortland College – B.A. Musical Theatre Performance

Total: 35 credits (plus University selected General electives)

Music Courses

Basic Musicianship I	3 credits
Basic Musicianship II	3 credits
Applied Piano	2 credits
Applied Voice (four semesters)	8 credits
Choral Union OR College Singers (one semester)	1 credit

Theatre Courses

Acting I	3 credits
Acting II	3 credits
Technical Theatre I	3 credits
Influences on American Musical Theatre	3 credits
Participation in Theatre (two semesters)	.5 credit

Dance Courses

Ballet I	1 credit
Ballet II	1 credit
Ballet III	1 credit
Ballet IV	1 credit
Jazz Dance I	1 credit
Tap Dance I	1 credit
Jazz Dance II	1 credit
Tap Dance II	1 credit
Jazz Dance II	1 credit

Musical Theatre Courses

Theatre Dance I	1 credit
Theatre Dance II	1 credit
Musical Theatre in American Culture	3 credits
Seminar in American Musical Theatre	3 credits
Musical Theatre Performance I	1 credit
Musical Theatre Performance II	2 credit

Additional Requirement

Introduction to Drama	3 credits
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Technical Theatre Practicum

Six noncredit technical theatre participation hours	0 credit
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Appendix D

James Madison University B.A. Musical Theatre Program

Total: 64 credits (plus university liberal arts requirements)

Core Requirements

Chosen Dance class from list of:

Elementary Modern, Elementary Ballet, Folk, Ballroom, Jazz, Tap, Dance Improvisation	2 credits
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Performance Production	3 credits
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Visual Aspects	3 credits
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Musical Theatre Concentration

Performance Analysis	3 credits
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Acting I	3 credits
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Theatre Practicum (three different areas of production + one performance)	4 credits
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European Theatre Tradition to 1800	3 credits
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European Theatre Tradition from 1800	3 credits
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Acting II	3 credits
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Music Theatre Performance	2 credits
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Music Theatre History and Analysis	3 credits
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Senior Seminar in Theatre	2 credits
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Advanced Musical Theatre Performance	2 credits
Jazz Dance	2 credits
Intermediate Jazz	2 credits
Intermediate Jazz II/Musical Theatre Styles	2 credits
Group Voice for Musical Theatre Concentrators	1 credit
Group Voice for Theatre/Dance	1 credit
Private Voice for Musical Theatre	4 credits
Theory I: Writing and Analysis	3 credits
Theory I: Aural Perception and Analysis	1 credit
Keyboard Skills I	1 credit
Keyboard Skills II	1 credit
One course in Musical Theatre Electives	3 credits

Vita

Justin Joseph Amellio was born on November 17th, 1981, in Syracuse, New York, and is an American Citizen. He graduated from Solvay High School in Solvay, NY in 1999. He received his Bachelor of Arts in Musical Theatre Performance and English Literature from the State University of New York, College at Cortland in 2003. He then worked his way throughout the East Coast performing and directing before finally relocating to Chicago, Illinois in 2005 to start a theatre company and teach theatre in the surrounding areas. In 2009 he matriculated at Virginia Commonwealth University where he taught undergraduate directing courses, assisted on musical theatre performance courses and directed and performed in the Richmond area as well. Justin received his Master of Fine Arts in Theatre Pedagogy from Virginia Commonwealth University in May 2011.